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Court blocks EPA rules for Oklahoma power plants

San Antonio Express-News, 06/23/2012

<http://bit.ly/MKJOMM>

Summary: A federal appeals court has blocked enforcement of an Environmental Protection Agency plan that would reduce pollution from Oklahoma's coal-fired power plants. The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday granted a request by the Attorney General Scott Pruitt, Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co. and others for a stay pending a review of the EPA's rule requiring the reduction of sulfur dioxide emissions at four electric generating units. The EPA's plan is designed to reduce pollution from coal-fired power plants and industrial sources to improve visibility at federally managed wilderness areas, including the 59,000-acre Wichita Mountain Wildlife Refuge near Lawton. It would affect plants operated by OG&E at Red Rock and Muskogee and another operated by Public Service Co. of Oklahoma at Oologah. Those three facilities, built more than 30 years ago, are responsible for more than one-third of the sulfur dioxide pollution emitted by all industrial and utility sources in the state, according to the EPA. The EPA accepted most of Oklahoma's plan for targeting the haze, but it also wanted the utilities to retrofit power plants with technology to reduce pollution.

OG&E, state win delay on EPA power plant rule

Tulsa World, 06/23/2012

<http://bit.ly/MKL7LH>

Summary: An appeals court on Friday temporarily blocked an Environmental Protection Agency rule aimed at reducing air pollution emissions from three northeastern Oklahoma power plants. The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals granted a stay requested by Oklahoma Gas & Electric Co. and Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt. The stay had been opposed by the EPA and the Oklahoma chapter of the Sierra Club, which contended that a delay of the rule would cause premature deaths from pollutants. The coal-fired plants are operated by OG&E, near Pawnee and Muskogee, and by American Electric Power-Public Service Company of Oklahoma, near Oologah. Pruitt and OG&E earlier this year began an appeal to overturn the EPA rule that was issued in December. It requires the plants to reduce sulfur-dioxide emissions. The plants are responsible for more than one-third of the sulfur-dioxide pollution from all industrial and utility sources in the state, according to the EPA.

EPA Announces \$3 Million in Environmental Job Training Grants

Environmental Protection Online, 06/22/2012

<http://bit.ly/MKLiXq>

Summary: Today at the Sewage and Water Board of New Orleans U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Assistant Administrator Mathy Stanislaus announced that EPA is awarding \$3 million to 15 grantees through the Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) program. The grants will recruit, train, and place unemployed individuals in jobs that address environmental challenges in their communities. These investments will protect the health of local communities by targeting economically disadvantaged neighborhoods where environmental cleanups and jobs are often most needed. "People want and deserve both a healthier environment and greater economic opportunity," said Mathy Stanislaus, assistant administrator for EPA's Office of Solid Waste and

Emergency Response. "This training program for environmental jobs has a proven track record. Approximately 71 percent of graduates find employment in environmental fields that serve local communities."

DOT Report Says Better Pipeline Oversight Needed

BNA's Daily Environment Report, 06/25/2012

<http://bit.ly/MKM6LO>

Summary: The Department of Transportation inspector general found that more rigorous oversight is needed for the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration's integrity management program for hazardous liquid pipelines, according to a report issued June 18. The integrity management program requires pipeline operators to take steps to reduce the likelihood of pipeline accidents in high-consequence areas. The report includes several recommendations to improve oversight of the program, including more onsite reviews of significant accidents, more quality assurance procedures to verify the accuracy of data submitted by operators, and the creation of a pilot program to determine if there is sufficient onsite field testing of program implementation. PHMSA Administrator Cynthia Quarterman said in a June 22 news release that the agency agrees "significantly more resources" are needed for oversight of the nation's hazardous liquid pipeline system.

EPA Describes How Green Infrastructure Can Be Incorporated Into Discharge Permits

BNA's Daily Environment Report, 06/25/2012

<http://bit.ly/MKMqKG>

Summary: The Environmental Protection Agency has released a series of documents that describe how green infrastructure techniques to manage stormwater and combined sewer overflows can be incorporated into discharge permits, plans for combined sewer overflows, and enforcement actions under the Clean Water Act. The agency has issued fact sheets describing how green infrastructure techniques, which can vary from building rain gardens to establishing urban wetlands, should be incorporated into National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits for stormwater and wastewater discharges and combined sewer and sanitary sewer overflows. The agency also has issued documents to describe how green infrastructure techniques can be used to write total maximum daily load plans and to develop water quality standards. In addition, EPA also has issued supplements for enforcement officials describing how to incorporate the use of such techniques into consent decrees.

Gulf of Mexico 'Dead Zone' Could Reach Size of Connecticut, Scientists Estimate

BNA's Daily Environment Report, 06/25/2012

<http://bit.ly/MKMHgF>

Summary: The "dead zone" in the northern Gulf of Mexico could be slightly larger than the state of Connecticut for the month of July, according to a scientific estimate released June 21. The paper, 2012 Forecast: Summer Hypoxic Zone Size, Northern Gulf of Mexico, estimating various predicted scenarios, was released by Nancy Rabelais, executive director and professor at the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium. The forecast for July is that the dead zone will cover 6,213 square miles of the bottom of the Outer Continental Shelf off Louisiana and Texas. The estimate was based on the May nitrogen loading from the Mississippi watershed to the Gulf of Mexico estimated by the U.S. Geological Survey. If the dead zone area becomes this large, it will be the 15th largest since systematic mapping of the dead zone began in 1985, the paper said.

As Utilities Transition Away From Coal, Sierra Club Wages 'Beyond Gas' Campaign

BNA's Daily Environment Report, 06/25/2012

<http://bit.ly/MKMLwH>

Summary: Although electric utilities have been shifting the U.S. energy mix toward cleaner-burning natural gas and away from coal, natural gas has some opponents among environmental advocates. The Sierra Club, which has opposed coal-fired power plants through its Beyond Coal campaign, also is targeting the practice of hydraulic

fracturing and the natural gas industry through its Beyond Natural Gas initiative. The group calls the industry “dirty, dangerous, and run amok,” arguing that fracking is an environmentally destructive process that can contaminate drinking water supplies. Sierra Club spokeswoman Maggie Kao told BNA the goal is to eliminate the use of fossil fuels by 2050. The Beyond Natural Gas campaign is working to oppose new gas-fired power plants, prevent fracking on public lands, block liquefied natural gas exports, and ensure that air and water are safe. “We are very concerned about the public health and environmental effects of air pollution from fracking, the secrecy around fracking fluids and of course, drinking water contamination,” Kao said.

Two trains collide in Oklahoma Panhandle; three crew members missing

News OK, 06/25/2012

<http://bit.ly/MKNtKm>

Summary: Three people were missing Sunday after two Union Pacific freight trains collided east of Goodwell in the Oklahoma Panhandle, authorities said. No names were released Sunday. The collision occurred shortly after 10 a.m., about one mile east of Goodwell in Texas County, Oklahoma Highway Patrol spokeswoman Betsy Randolph said. “I don't even know how to describe it. It's like nothing I've ever seen before. I've never seen anything of this magnitude,” she said. A train carrying new automobiles was traveling west on the track and collided head-on with an eastbound train carrying a variety of cargo. One of the containers was carrying resin solution, which is a hazardous material, but did not catch fire. It was being doused with water to prevent fire or explosion, Espinoza said.

Court blocks EPA rules for Oklahoma power plants

Updated 01:43 p.m., Saturday, June 23, 2012

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — A federal appeals court has blocked enforcement of an Environmental Protection Agency plan that would reduce pollution from Oklahoma's coal-fired power plants.

The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday granted a request by the Attorney General Scott Pruitt, Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co. and others for a stay pending a review of the EPA's rule requiring the reduction of sulfur dioxide emissions at four electric generating units.

The EPA's plan is designed to reduce pollution from coal-fired power plants and industrial sources to improve visibility at federally managed wilderness areas, including the 59,000-acre Wichita Mountain Wildlife Refuge near Lawton. It would affect plants operated by OG&E at Red Rock and Muskogee and another operated by Public Service Co. of Oklahoma at Oologah.

Those three facilities, built more than 30 years ago, are responsible for more than one-third of the sulfur dioxide pollution emitted by all industrial and utility sources in the state, according to the EPA.

The EPA accepted most of Oklahoma's plan for targeting the haze, but it also wanted the utilities to retrofit power plants with technology to reduce pollution.

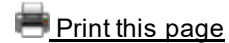
Pruitt, citing data from the utilities, has said the cost of installing that technology could cause consumer electricity rates to rise more than 13 percent over the next three years.

On Friday, he called the appeals decision "a significant victory" for Oklahoma.

"The EPA exceeded its authority under the Clean Air Act, and we will continue to challenge that decision to preserve the ability of Oklahoma stakeholders to create an Oklahoma solution," Pruitt said in a statement.

An EPA spokesman didn't immediately return telephone and email messages seeking comment.






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OG&E, state win delay on EPA power plant rule

BY ROBERT BOCZKIEWICZ World Correspondent

Saturday, June 23, 2012

6/23/2012 7:31:49 AM

DENVER - An appeals court on Friday temporarily blocked an Environmental Protection Agency rule aimed at reducing air pollution emissions from three northeastern Oklahoma power plants.

The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals granted a stay requested by Oklahoma Gas & Electric Co. and Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt.

The stay had been opposed by the EPA and the Oklahoma chapter of the Sierra Club, which contended that a delay of the rule would cause premature deaths from pollutants.

The coal-fired plants are operated by OG&E, near Pawnee and Muskogee, and by American Electric Power-Public Service Company of Oklahoma, near Oologah.

Pruitt and OG&E earlier this year began an appeal to overturn the EPA rule that was issued in December. It requires the plants to reduce sulfur-dioxide emissions.

The plants are responsible for more than one-third of the sulfur-dioxide pollution from all industrial and utility sources in the state, according to the EPA.

The Denver-based appeals court is not likely to decide until months from now whether to overturn the rule. A stay keeps the EPA's requirement from taking effect until the court issues its decision.

The requirement would cost OG&E and its customers more than \$1.2 billion, Pruitt and OG&E told the appellate judges in April.

The attorney general's staff said the EPA rule "is not health-related."

The appellate judges, in a two-sentence ruling, did not elaborate on why the stay was granted.

In a statement, OG&E officials said they were "pleased with the court's decision and believe it's the right approach. It prevents us from having to make costly investments and ensures that an economic burden isn't placed on our customers before the 10th Circuit rules on the merits of the case."

The Sierra Club viewed the delay as "only a temporary setback," saying the group is optimistic that the rule is well-supported by scientific and medical evidence and will be upheld this fall after the court has the opportunity to review the merits of the case.

The environmental group said OG&E should "follow the lead set by Public Service Company of Oklahoma to stop spending money on legal challenges and instead invest in clean air and home-grown energy sources."

AEP-PSO and the EPA have agreed in principle on a plan that would eliminate the company's coal-fired generation plants in Oologah within 15 years, state and utility officials announced earlier this year.

The EPA did not respond to a request for comment.

Pruitt called the stay "a significant victory for the state of Oklahoma, and it temporarily prevents the EPA from enforcing a federal plan that will raise utility rates for Oklahoma consumers. The EPA exceeded its authority under the Clean Air Act, and we will continue to challenge that decision to preserve the ability of Oklahoma stakeholders to create an Oklahoma solution."

Original Print Headline: OG&E, state win EPA-rule delay

Associated Images:



Attorney General Scott
Pruitt: The ruling
"prevents the EPA from
enforcing a federal plan
that will raise utility
rates," he said

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Environmental PROTECTION

Jun 22, 2012

Today at the Sewage and Water Board of New Orleans U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Assistant Administrator Mathy Stanislaus announced that EPA is awarding \$3 million to 15 grantees through the Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) program. The grants will recruit, train, and place unemployed individuals in jobs that address environmental challenges in their communities. These investments will protect the health of local communities by targeting economically disadvantaged neighborhoods where environmental cleanups and jobs are often most needed.

"People want and deserve both a healthier environment and greater economic opportunity," said Mathy Stanislaus, assistant administrator for EPA's Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response. "This training program for environmental jobs has a proven track record. Approximately 71 percent of graduates find employment in environmental fields that serve local communities."

EPA's Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training program seeks to stimulate the partnership development among local workforce investment boards, community-based organizations, governmental entities, and academic institutions. The program also helps to enhance the skills and the availability of local labor while providing communities the flexibility to design training programs that meet their individual market's demands and preferences.

The 15 grantees are:

- North Star Center for Human Development, Inc., Connecticut - Plans to train 60 students, and place at least 54 graduates in environmental jobs.
- Groundwork Providence, Rhode Island - Plans to train a minimum of 54 students, and place at least 45 graduates in environmental jobs.
- City of Glens Fall, New York - Plans to train 100 students, and place 90 graduates in environmental jobs.
- City Durham, North Carolina - Plans to train 60 students, and place 42 graduates in environmental jobs.
- City of Toledo, Ohio - Plans to train a minimum of 75 students, and place at least 60 graduates in environmental jobs.
- City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin - Plans to train a minimum of 80 students, and place at least 64 graduates in environmental jobs.
- Arkansas Construction Education Foundation, Arkansas - Plans to train 90 students, and place 72 graduates in environmental jobs.
- City of Camden, Arkansas - Plans to train 45 students, and place at least 36 graduates in environmental jobs.

- Limitless Vistas, Inc., Louisiana - Plans to train 40 students, and place at least 32 graduates in environmental jobs.
- Iowa Western Community College, Iowa - Plans to train 100 students, and place 80 graduates in jobs.
- Cypress Mandela Training Center, Inc., California - Plans to train a minimum of 80 students, and place at least 60 graduates in environmental jobs.
- Los Angeles Conservation Corps, California - Plans to train 60 students, and place at least 48 graduates in environmental jobs.
- The Hunters Point Family, California - Plans to train a minimum of 54 students, and place at least 43 graduates in environmental jobs.
- Nye County, Nevada - Plans to train a minimum of 54 students, and place at least 43 graduates in environmental jobs.
- Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc., Oregon - Plans to train a minimum of 30 students, and place at least 23 graduates in environmental jobs.

Since 1998, EPA has awarded more than \$42 million under the Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training program. As of June 2012, approximately 10,300 individuals had completed training and approximately 7,300 obtained employment in the environmental field, with an average starting hourly wage of \$14.12. The development of this green workforce will allow the trainees to develop skills that will make them competitive in the construction and redevelopment fields.

Graduates of the program are equipped with skills and certifications in various environmental fields including lead and asbestos abatement, environmental site sampling, construction and demolition debris recycling, underground storage tank removal, ecological restoration, and green building techniques. Graduates use these skills to improve the environment and people's health while supporting economic development in their communities.

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Daily Environment Report™

Source: Daily Environment Report: News Archive > 2012 > June > 06/25/2012 > News > In Brief > Pipeline Safety: DOT Report Says Better Pipeline Oversight Needed

121 DEN A-14

Pipeline Safety

DOT Report Says Better Pipeline Oversight Needed

The Department of Transportation inspector general found that more rigorous oversight is needed for the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration's integrity management program for hazardous liquid pipelines, according to a report issued June 18. The integrity management program requires pipeline operators to take steps to reduce the likelihood of pipeline accidents in high-consequence areas. The report includes several recommendations to improve oversight of the program, including more onsite reviews of significant accidents, more quality assurance procedures to verify the accuracy of data submitted by operators, and the creation of a pilot program to determine if there is sufficient onsite field testing of program implementation. PHMSA Administrator Cynthia Quarterman said in a June 22 news release that the agency agrees "significantly more resources" are needed for oversight of the nation's hazardous liquid pipeline system. The DOT inspector general's report is available at <http://op.bna.com/env.nsf/r?Open=jstn-8vhp34>.

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Daily Environment Report™

Source: Daily Environment Report: News Archive > 2012 > June > 06/25/2012 > News > Water Pollution: EPA Describes How Green Infrastructure Can Be Incorporated Into Discharge Permits

121 DEN A-13

Water Pollution

EPA Describes How Green Infrastructure Can Be Incorporated Into Discharge Permits

by David S. Goss

The Environmental Protection Agency has released a series of documents that describe how green infrastructure techniques to manage stormwater and combined sewer overflows can be incorporated into discharge permits, plans for combined sewer overflows, and enforcement actions under the Clean Water Act.

The agency has issued fact sheets describing how green infrastructure techniques, which can vary from building rain gardens to establishing urban wetlands, should be incorporated into National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits for stormwater and wastewater discharges and combined sewer and sanitary sewer overflows.

The agency also has issued documents to describe how green infrastructure techniques can be used to write total maximum daily load plans and to develop water quality standards.

In addition, EPA also has issued supplements for enforcement officials describing how to incorporate the use of such techniques into consent decrees.

Effort to Help Federal, State Officials

EPA said the purpose of these documents is to assist federal and state permitting and enforcement officials in defining green infrastructure, measuring reductions in pollutant discharges, and reporting on milestones.

The fact sheets build on EPA's April 2011 memo on green infrastructure (84 DEN A-7, 5/2/11).

It also builds on EPA's recently issued integrated planning policy for municipalities that emphasizes the use of green infrastructure as an alternative to traditional pipes and drains to manage stormwater and wastewater (113 DEN A-11, 6/13/12).

According to EPA, green infrastructure reduces stormwater runoff volumes and reduces peak flows by utilizing the natural retention and absorption capabilities of vegetation and soils.

Metrics Used for Oversight

"When implementing grey infrastructure approaches, permittees will typically report on progress in meeting schedules and milestones, and in many cases will monitor and report on discharge characteristics. The same applies to green infrastructure elements," the agency wrote in a fact sheet titled *Guidance for Green Infrastructure*.

For instance, the agency said, permit writers can include metrics to measure effectiveness of green infrastructure by looking at the volume of combined sewer overflows to see if there are any reductions.

To meet reporting requirements, the agency said, the dischargers can count the number of green roofs installed or rain gardens planted.

In one of three supplements, EPA has provided examples of seven consent decrees entered since 2003 on combined sewer overflows that incorporate green infrastructure. These include the 2003 settlement reached with the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority and the 2005 consent decree reached with the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission in Maryland, among others.

For More Information

EPA's six fact sheets and three supplements on green infrastructure are available at http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/greeninfrastructure/gi_regulatory.cfm.



Source: Daily Environment Report: News Archive > 2012 > June > 06/25/2012 > News > Water Pollution: Gulf of Mexico 'Dead Zone' Could Reach Size of Connecticut, Scientists Estimate

121 DEN A-11

Water Pollution

Gulf of Mexico 'Dead Zone' Could Reach Size of Connecticut, Scientists Estimate

By Linda A. Oeder

The "dead zone" in the northern Gulf of Mexico could be slightly larger than the state of Connecticut for the month of July, according to a scientific estimate released June 21.

The paper, "2012 Forecast: Summer Hypoxic Zone in the Northern Gulf of Mexico" estimating various predicted scenarios, was released by Nancy Rabalais, executive director and professor at the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium.

The forecast for July is that the dead zone will cover 6,213 square miles of the bottom of the Outer Continental Shelf off Louisiana and Texas.

The estimate was based on the May nitrogen loading from the Mississippi watershed to the Gulf of Mexico estimated by the U.S. Geological Survey. If the dead zone area becomes this large, it will be the 15th largest since systematic mapping of the dead zone began in 1985, the paper said.

Hypoxia, or low oxygen, occurs when the concentration of dissolved oxygen in the water column decreases to a level that can no longer support living aquatic organisms. Hypoxic areas, or "dead zones," have increased in duration and frequency across the world since first being noted in the 1970s, according to the Louisiana Consortium.

Overall, the paper said, the amount of nutrient loading from the river has remained the same in recent decades or is increasing. It cited agricultural land use as the primary driver.

Predictions Said to Vary

Predictions vary widely. Under another scenario cited in the paper, the dead zone could be much less — 1,712 square miles when measured in late July, one of the smaller dead zones in recent history, the paper said.

Last year's dead zone in July reached 6,767 square miles. So the dead zone under one scenario this year would be about the same and under another scenario, it could be much less.

Rabalais told BNA that so far, farm practices that release nutrients such as nitrogen into the Mississippi, even if they show improvement, are not the reason for the difference from last year. The river flow last year was at a record high, while the river flow is much lower this year, she said.

The larger dead zone prediction uses measurements that incorporate a changing environment from year to year. The simpler scenario is based on only the nutrient load from the Mississippi River in May.

The Mississippi River discharge in May 2012 is the fourth lowest from 1968 to 2012 and was the lowest since 2000, according to the report.

End-of-Summer Final Estimate

But Rabalais said scientists will not know an accurate estimate until the end of the summer, after they obtain new data and compare the merits of the two models.

According to the paper, hypoxic water masses, commonly known as dead zones, in bottom waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico occur when the oxygen concentration falls below two milligrams per liter. This hypoxic water is distributed across the Louisiana shelf west of the Mississippi River and onto the upper Texas coast, from near shore to nearly 78 miles offshore, and in water depths up to 60 miles.

The dead zone has been found in all months, but it is most persistent and severe in summer, the paper said. The July distribution of hypoxic waters most often is a single continuous zone along the Louisiana and adjacent Texas shelf. Hypoxia also occurs east of the Mississippi River delta, but it covers less area and is ephemeral.

There also was a large area of hypoxia east of the river in July resulting from the record-high discharge and nutrient loads from the 2011 flood and diversions of river water to the east of the river to avoid potential flooding in New Orleans, the paper said.

For More Information

The report, 2012 Forecast: Summer Hypoxic Zone Size, Northern Gulf of Mexico, is available at <http://op.bna.com/env.nsf/r?Open=fwhe-8vhrwe>.

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Source: Daily Environment Report: News Archive > 2012 > June > 06/25/2012 > Special Report > Air Pollution: As Utilities Transition Away From Coal, Sierra Club Wages 'Beyond Gas' Campaign

121 DEN B-3

Air Pollution

As Utilities Transition Away From Coal, Sierra Club Wages 'Beyond Gas' Campaign

By Andrew Childers and Jessica Coomes

Although electric utilities have been shifting the U.S. energy mix toward cleaner-burning natural gas and away from coal, natural gas has some opponents among environmental advocates.

The Sierra Club, which has opposed coal-fired power plants through its Beyond Coal campaign, also is targeting the practice of hydraulic fracturing and the natural gas industry through its Beyond Natural Gas initiative. The group calls the industry "dirty, dangerous, and run amok," arguing that fracking is an environmentally destructive process that can contaminate drinking water supplies.

Sierra Club spokeswoman Maggie Kao told BNA the goal is to eliminate the use of fossil fuels by 2050. The Beyond Natural Gas campaign is working to oppose new gas-fired power plants, prevent fracking on public lands, block liquefied natural gas exports, and ensure that air and water are safe.

"We are very concerned about the public health and environmental effects of air pollution from fracking, the secrecy around fracking fluids and of course, drinking water contamination," Kao said.

Gas May Not Be Cleaner Than Coal

She also said natural gas-fired power plants are not necessarily cleaner than coal plants.

"Some studies have suggested that natural gas burns cleaner than coal, while other studies suggest that the greenhouse gas emissions from the natural gas industry may be as potent as coal, perhaps even worse," Kao said.

For example, she cited a paper written by environmental and academic researchers that was published Feb. 13 in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. The report found that methane leaks that occur during natural gas production, transportation, and use can offset the benefits of switching from coal to natural gas.

"It is likely that leakage at individual natural gas well sites is high enough, when combined with leakage from downstream operations, to make the total leakage exceed the ... threshold beyond which gas becomes worse for the climate than coal for at least some period of time," the paper said.

Daniel Kish, senior vice president for policy at the Institute for Energy Research, a nonprofit that promotes free-market policies and has criticized the Obama administration's energy policies, told BNA he expects opposition to construction of new gas-fired power plants.

"They're going to come under attack," Kish said. "The people who oppose CO₂ from coal plants will oppose CO₂ coming from natural gas plants as well. That doesn't change. They dislike it less, but it's coming."

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Two trains collide in Oklahoma Panhandle; three crew members missing

Three of the four crew members are missing after two freight trains collided Sunday morning near Goodwell in the Oklahoma Panhandle, authorities said.

BY MATT DINGER mdinger@opubco.com | Modified: June 25, 2012 at 12:28 am | Published: June 24, 2012

GOODWELL — Three people were missing Sunday after two Union Pacific freight trains collided east of Goodwell in the Oklahoma Panhandle, authorities said.

Two engineers and one conductor were unaccounted for after the collision, Union Pacific Railroad spokeswoman Raquel Espinoza said.

The conductor of the westbound train jumped from the train before the crash, she said.

“He did not require any medical treatment, but is understandably pretty shaken up,” Espinoza said.

No names were released Sunday.

The collision occurred shortly after 10 a.m., about one mile east of Goodwell in Texas County, Oklahoma Highway Patrol spokeswoman Betsy Randolph said.

“I don’t even know how to describe it. It’s like nothing I’ve ever seen before. I’ve never seen anything of this magnitude,” she said.

A train carrying new automobiles was traveling west on the track and collided head-on with an eastbound train carrying a variety of cargo. One of the containers was carrying resin solution, which is a hazardous material, but did not catch fire. It was being doused with water to prevent fire or explosion, Espinoza said.

The crash

Gary Mathews was driving down U.S. 54 when the trains collided, and witnessed the accident.

“Saw trains coming toward each other for about 3 miles. Heard the eastbound train blowing the horn and going 68 mph, even speed,” Mathews said. “The trains hit head-on and then derailed. The westbound train was hauling cars. The westbound train laid over on its side as I passed. I did not see any operators inside the trains. I was 500 yards from the train when it collided,” Mathews told the Guymon Daily Herald.

“A wall of heat hit my windshield and came through it from the explosion of engines. The eastbound train had three engines on it. The westbound train had two. The westbound train was moving very slow before the collision,” Mathews told the newspaper.

The cause of the crash had not been determined Sunday and it is unclear whether there was radio communication between the two trains or if brakes were applied before the collision, Espinoza said.

“We have safety procedures in place to prevent accidents. Something clearly went wrong and we are investigating,” Espinoza said.

The National Transportation Safety Board was en route to the crash site Sunday evening.

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